

READING SUGGESTIONS FOR INDEPENDENT STUDY

GREAT BRITAIN

16th and 17th century

- Shakespeare, William, *Romeo & Juliet*. 1594-95.
A Midsummer Night's Dream. 1595-96.
Hamlet. 1600-01.
Othello. 1604-05.
Macbeth. 1605-06.

18th and 19th century

- Austen, Jane, *Sense and Sensibility*. 1811. (For sensible Elinor Dashwood and her impetuous younger sister Marianne the prospect of marrying the men they love appears remote. In a world ruled by money and self-interest, the Dashwood sisters have neither fortune nor connections...)
Pride and Prejudice. 1813. (Set in England in the early 19th century, *Pride and Prejudice* tells the story of Mr and Mrs Bennet's five unmarried daughters after the rich and eligible Mr Bingley and his status-conscious friend, Mr Darcy, have moved into their neighbourhood. While Bingley takes an immediate liking to the eldest Bennet daughter, Jane, Darcy has difficulty adapting to local society and repeatedly clashes with the second-eldest Bennet daughter, Elizabeth...)
- Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein*. 1818. (Shelley's enduringly popular and rich gothic tale, *Frankenstein*, confronts some of the most feared innovations of evolutionism and science—topics such as degeneracy, hereditary disease, and humankind's ability to act as creator of the modern world.)
- Brontë, Charlotte, *Jane Eyre*. 1847. (Jane, a poor orphan, grows up with an aunt and cousins who hate her. Sent away to an orphanage, she only manages to survive through her strong will. But her life dramatically changes when she finds a job as a governess at mysterious Thornfield Hall...)
- Brontë, Emily, *Wuthering Heights*. 1847 (Lockwood, a temporary tenant of Thrushcross Grange, stumbles unexpectedly into the violent world of *Wuthering Heights*, the home of his landlord Heathcliff. Lockwood gradually learns about the destinies of the Earnshaw and the Linton family, their entanglement and their passions that brought them apart. This novel is justly famous for its complex structure, its acute evocation of place and of its poetic grandeur and vision.)
- Conrad, Joseph, *Heart of Darkness*. 1899. (Marlow, an experienced sailor, travels into the centre of the Belgian Congo on a mission to find Kurtz, a trader gone missing. As he gets further and further into unexplored territory, he himself is confronted with the dark regions of his self.)
- Dickens, Charles, *Oliver Twist*. 1838. (Oliver, a small orphan boy grows up among London's poor and criminal and struggling for a better life. This is only granted after many misadventures.)
David Copperfield. 1849-50. (Sent away from his cruel stepfather, young David endures many hardships at boarding school and in London. But with luck and through his own efforts, he eventually finds true love.)

Eliot, George, *The Mill on the Floss*. 1860. (This novel is a masterpiece. As the headstrong Maggie Tulliver grows into womanhood, the deep love she has for her brother Tom turns into conflict because she cannot reconcile his bourgeois standards with her own lively intelligence. But she is unable to adapt to her community or break free from it, and the result is tragedy.)

Elizabeth Gaskell, *Mary Barton*. 1848. (Mary is the beautiful daughter of an embittered factory worker and trade unionist. Through an unfortunate chain of events she becomes indirectly involved in the murder of a rich admirer of hers. When she discovers the murderer, her life turns into a nightmare that only ends after many tests and trials.)

North and South. 1855. (When her father leaves the Church in a crisis of conscience, Margaret Hale is uprooted from her comfortable home in Hampshire to move with her family to the North of England. Initially repulsed by the ugliness of her new surroundings in the industrial town of Milton, Margaret becomes aware of the poverty and suffering of local mill workers and develops a passionate sense of social justice. This is intensified by her tempestuous relationship with the mill-owner and self-made man John Thornton, as their fierce opposition over his treatment of his employees masks a deeper attraction.)

Hardy, Thomas, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*. 1891. (To help her struggling parents, young Tess goes away from her small village to work for the rich d'Urbervilles, where she is seduced and left pregnant. When Angel Clare appears in her life, happiness seems close, but is tragically destroyed.)

Wilde, Oscar, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. 1880. (As beautiful Dorian Gray gazes on his portrait, he utters the wish never to grow old. This forms the basis of this brilliant and disturbing story of a gilded and spoilt hedonist who, Faust-like, is willing to sell his soul for his beauty.)

The Importance of Being Earnest. 1895. (Set in England during the late Victorian era, the play's humour derives in part from characters maintaining fictitious identities to escape unwelcome social obligations. It is replete with witty dialogue and satirizes some of the foibles and hypocrisy of late Victorian society. It has proved Wilde's most enduringly popular play.)

20th and 21st century

Banville, John, *The Sea*. 2006. (How did Robert Purcell, distinguished barrister and perfect specimen of the British Establishment, end up in prison? An intellectual giant but an emotional pygmy, Robert is a man struggling to come to terms with the forces that have brought him down, from the wife who wanted him to change, to the ex-girlfriend who came back to haunt him and the childhood bully who turned into an adult bully.)

Boyd, William, *Restless*. 2006. (This gripping spy novel depicts the tale of a young woman who discovers that her mother was recruited as a spy during World War II. It is one of the first novels to deal with the British Security Coordination service in New York.)

Burnside, John, *A Summer of Drowning*. 2011. (This novel is set on an Arctic island and narrated by Liv, the child of a celebrated landscape painter from Oslo. She is afraid that two of her classmates, who drowned in still waters within days of one another, were lured to their death by a mythical temptress known as the 'huldra'. We are led to expect a mystery, but what we actually get is weirder...)

Faulks, Sebastian, *Birdsong*. 1993. (This intensely romantic yet stunningly realistic novel spans three generations and the unimaginable gulf between the First World War and the present, with the young Englishman Stephen Wraysford passing through a tempestuous love affair with Isabelle Azaire in France and entering the dark, surreal world beneath the trenches of No Man's Land during WWI.)

Engelby. 2008. (Meet Mike Engleby, a second-year student at university. Despite the fact that Mike is obviously intelligent, and involved in many clubs, it is clear that something about Mike is not quite right. When he becomes fixated on a classmate named Jennifer Arkland, and she goes missing, we are left with the looming question: Is Mike Engleby involved?)

- Forster, E.M., *Howard's End*. 1910. (The two artistically-minded Schlegel sisters are clearly different from the Wilcoxes, a family pursuing material goals. But their lives are shared and changed through love and conflict. What endures is Howard's End, the house in which most of the novel is set.)
- Passage to India*. 1924. (What really happened in the Marabar caves? This is the mystery at the heart of this novel, the puzzle that sets in motion events highlighting an even larger question: Can an Englishman during the British Raj and an Indian be friends?)
- Frayn, Michael *Spies*. 2002. (During WWII, two boys – Keith and Steve – grow up in seeming peace. But then they realise that all is not well when one day Keith announces a disconcerting discovery: the Germans have infiltrated his own family.... . A beautifully accomplished, gripping and nostalgic novel.)
- Greene, Graham, *The Quiet American*. 1955. (During the French-Vietnamese conflict Pyle, a young American agent new to Vietnam, meets the British war correspondent Fowler and his mistress Phuong. Against the background of the war drama their personal drama builds up, escalating in Pyle's death.)
- Our Man in Havana*. 1958. (This satire on the British secret service before the Cuban revolution centres on Wormold, a salesman for vacuum cleaners stationed in Havana with his demanding daughter. When he is offered a job as a well-paid agent, he can't resist, although he is totally incompetent. But he has creative ideas to pretend he is first-class... ..)
- Hartley, L.P., *The Go-Between*. 1953. (The narrator in this novel recalls a holiday that he spent as a boy at a rich classmate's country mansion. There he is traumatically initiated into the family's adult world of passion, deception and hypocrisy.)
- Huxley, Aldous, *Brave New World*. 1932. (Bernard Marx lives in a futuristic world where human beings are produced artificially and conditioned to behave peacefully. But Bernard rebels against this totalitarian system that leaves no freedom for the individual.)
- Ishiguro, Kazuo, *The Remains of the Day*. 1989. (Stevens is a model English butler who believes that he has served humanity by devoting his life to the service of a "great" man, Lord Darlington. The time is 1956; Darlington has died, and Darlington Hall has been let to an American businessman. As Stevens goes to see the former housekeeper of Darlington Hall, he also embarks on a harrowing journey through his own memory causing him to question not only Lord Darlington's greatness, but also the meaning of his own insular life.)
- Never Let Me Go*. 2005. (In one of the most acclaimed novels of recent years, Ishiguro imagines the lives of a group of students growing up in a darkly skewed version of contemporary England. Narrated by Kathy, now thirty-one, the novel dramatises her attempts to come to terms with her childhood at the seemingly idyllic Hailsham School and with the fate that has always awaited her and her closest friends in the wider world. A story of love, friendship and memory, *Never Let Me Go* is charged throughout with a sense of the fragility of life.)
- Le Carré, John, *The Spy Who Came in from the Cold*. 1963. (This spy novel occurs during the heightened-alert politico-military tensions that characterised the late 1950s and early 1960s of the Cold War, when a Warsaw Pact–NATO war in Europe (Germany) seemed likely. The novel has become famous for its portrayal of Western espionage methods as morally inconsistent with Western democracy and values. The novel received critical acclaim at the time of its publication and has remained an international best-seller.)
- Maugham, Somerset, *The Moon and Sixpence*. 1919. (At the centre of this biographical novel set in France and the South Pacific is a man closely modelled on the painter Paul Gauguin. He leaves his conventional life behind to turn into a passionate but lonely artist.)
- The Painted Veil*. 1925. (Kitty Fane is the beautiful but shallow wife of Walter, a bacteriologist stationed in Hong Kong. Dissatisfied with her marriage, she starts an affair with charming, attractive and exciting Charles Townsend. But when Walter discovers her

deception, he exacts a strange and terrible vengeance: Kitty must accompany him to his new posting in remote mainland China, where a cholera epidemic rages..)

McEwan, Ian,

Atonement. 2001. (On the hottest day of the summer of 1934, thirteen-year-old Briony Tallis sees her sister Cecilia strip off her clothes and plunge into the fountain in the garden of their country house. Watching her is Robbie Turner, her childhood friend, who, like Cecilia, has come down from Cambridge. By the end of that day the lives of all three will have been changed for ever.... .)

The Children Act. 2014. (Fiona Maye, a leading High Court judge, is renowned for her fierce intelligence. But her professional success belies private sorrow and domestic strife as her marriage of thirty years is in crisis.

At the same time, she is called on to try an urgent case: Adam, a beautiful seventeen-year-old boy, is refusing for religious reasons the medical treatment that could save his life, and his devout parents echo his wishes. Time is running out. Should the secular court overrule sincerely expressed faith?)

Orwell, George,

Animal Farm. 1946. (In this allegory on the failure of a revolution and, more specifically of the Russian Revolution, the animals of Mr Jones's farm revolt against their human masters and establish their own regime based on equality and fairness. But things begin to change ominously when some of the animals declare themselves "more equal" than others.)

Nineteen Eighty-Four. 1949. (Winston Smith is deeply at odds with the totalitarian regime in which he lives. His attempts to break free from oppression, however, tragically fail when he is betrayed by people he has trusted.)

Shaffer, Peter,

Equus. 1983. (The 17-year-old Alan is sent to a psychiatric clinic after he has blinded six horses in the most cruel way. In the course of his therapy there Martin Dysart, his psychiatrist, slowly uncovers the background to this horrible crime. At the same time Dysart himself is seriously challenged by more fundamental spiritual doubts.)

Spark, Muriel,

The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie. 1961 (Set in Edinburgh in the 1930s, this novel describes the career of Miss Brodie, an eccentric teacher at a girls' school who dominates a group of 16-year-olds. After a trip to Hitler's Germany she is falsely accused of sympathising with Fascism and dismissed from her job.)

Waugh, Evelyn,

Decline and Fall. 1928. (This satire on Britain's public school life and decadent upper class recounts the career of Paul Pennyfeather, who is sent down from an Oxford college for 'indecent behaviour'. Although he is in fact the innocent victim of a drunken orgy, he is forced to take on a teaching position at a boy's school where he turns into the lover of an eccentric and glamorous young mother.)

Men at Arms. 1952. (This novel is the first novel in Waugh's masterful Sword of Honour series, the author's look at the Second World War. The novels loosely parallel Waugh's wartime experiences.)

Wells, H.G.

The Invisible Man. 1897. (This early first science-fiction novel is about a scientist who fatally stumbles upon the secret of invisibility.)

The Time Machine. 1895. (This social allegory is set in the year 802701, describing a society divided into two classes, the subterranean workers, called Morlocks, and the decadent Eloi.)

Woolf, Virginia,

Mrs Dalloway. 1925. (The action of this short but intense novel is restricted to the events of one day in central London, as Clarissa Dalloway sets off to buy flowers for her party that evening, the party which provides the culmination of the book. Her interior monologue, interwoven with the sights and sounds of the urban scene, is handled with the great confidence and bravura that herald a new phase in Woolf's mastery of the novel.)

To the Lighthouse. 1927. (This novel draws powerfully on the author's recollection of family holidays in Cornwall. Her parents provided the inspiration for the maternal, much-

admired Mrs Ramsay, and the self-centred, absurd and tragic figure of the philosopher, Mr Ramsay, who become the focus of one of Woolf's most profound explorations of the conflict between the male and female principles.)

USA

19th and early 20th century

- Beecher Stowe, Harriet,** *Uncle Tom's Cabin. 1852.* (Few novels in American history have grabbed the public spotlight and caused as great an uproar as Uncle Tom's Cabin. Across the north, readers on the novel's publication became acutely aware of the horrors of slavery on a far more personal level than ever before. In the south the book was met with outrage and branded an irresponsible book of distortions and overstatements.)
- James, Henry,** *Daisy Miller. 1878.* (Daisy Miller, fresh from the high society of Schenectady, New York, neither knows nor cares about local notions of propriety in Europe, and the conflict between her free-spirited foolishness and the society she offends in Rome is at the heart of the novel.)
- The Turn of the Screw. 1898* (This chilling story of a lone governess's struggle to protect her two small charges from the ghosts of two former servants is a masterpiece of narrative ambiguity. Are the ghosts real demons, embodiments of evil? Or are they simply hallucinations, projections of the governess's inner torments?)
- Wharton, Edith,** *The House of Mirth. 1905.* (Although she has beauty and charm and is related to prominent New York families, Lily Bart is unmarried at 29. Torn between her desire for independence and her ambition for wealth and position, she tragically fails as a woman too emancipated for her time.)
- The Age of Innocence. 1920.* (In the highest circle of New York's society of the 1870s, Newland Archer is the fiancé of Mary Welland. But when he meets Mary's unconventional cousin, Ellen Olenska, who has escaped from an unhappy marriage to a dissolute Polish count in Europe, the two fall passionately in love. Yet it is too late for Archer to withdraw from his engagement... .)

20th and 21st century

- Begley, Louis,** *Wartime Lies. 1991.* (As the world slips into the throes of Hitler's Third Reich, Maciek, the young son of a well-to-do Jewish family in Poland, sees his warm and protected childhood vanish forever. As Warsaw falls, he escapes with his beautiful aunt Tanja. On the run, in hiding, changing their names, and forging documents, they endure and survive the war together.)
- T. C. Boyle,** *Tortilla Curtain. 1996.* (When Delaney Mossbacher knocks down a Mexican pedestrian, he neither reports the accident nor takes his victim to hospital. Instead the man accepts \$20 and limps back to poverty and his pregnant 17-year-old wife, leaving Delaney to return to his privileged life in California. But these two men are fated against each other, as Delaney attempts to clear the land of the illegal immigrants who he thinks are turning his state park into a ghetto...)
- Capote, Truman,** *In Cold Blood. 1966.* (Described by its author as a "non-fiction novel" it tells of the murder of a well-to-do farmer in Kansas, his wife, and two children, by two ex-convicts in the process of committing a robbery of their home in 1959. The documentation of their escape to Mexico, capture, trial and hanging opens larger social issues.)
- Fitzgerald, F. Scott,** *The Great Gatsby. 1925.* (Fitzgerald's superb novel is about an enormously rich man named Gatsby, in love with a woman, Daisy, who is married to equally rich Tom Buchanan. Gatsby dreams that one day he and Daisy will get together. He has worked hard to become the man that he believes will impress Daisy. But his life is doomed...)
- Tender is the Night. 1934.* (The Divers, rich Americans living in Europe, are outwardly a perfect family. But Dick and his wife Nicole share a secret that overshadows their existence. When Rosemary Hoyt, an film actress débutante, steps into their lives, their harmony begins to crumble.)

- Fox, Paula, *Poor George*. 1967. (George Mecklin, a restless young teacher at a private school in Manhattan, is depressed by his life of vague moral purpose. When he discovers a local adolescent breaking into his house, he decides to tutor him rather than handing him over to the police, as his nagging wife insists.)
- Desperate Characters*. 1970. (Otto and Sophie Bentwood, a young childless couple, live a spotless but sterile life in Brooklyn. After Sophie is bitten while feeding a half-starved cat, a series of small and ominous disasters begin to reveal the fault lines and fractures in their marriage - and of a society - wrenching itself apart.)
- Hemingway, Ernest, *A Farewell to Arms*. 1929. (Frederic Henry, an American lieutenant in the Italian ambulance service during World War I, falls in love with an English nurse, Catherine Barkley. When Henry is wounded in a bombardment and sent to a hospital in Milan, Catherine comes to nurse him. There their love matures, but their bliss can't last...)
- Lee, Harper, *To Kill a Mockingbird*. 1960. (In this exquisite Scout Finch, the young daughter of a white defence lawyer in a small Southern town, tells the story of a sensational trial. Tom Robinson, a black man, has been accused of raping a white woman. As the story unravels, we also learn more about the people in this segregated community, as well as about the childhood experiences of the inimitable Scout and her brother Jem.)
- Miller, Arthur, *Death of a Salesman*. 1949. (This play fuses realism and symbolism as it reviews the tragic life of an elderly salesman victimised by his own false values and those of modern America.)
- The Crucible*. 1953. (Set in Salem during the notorious witch trials of 1692, this play is also a parable for America during the paranoid era of McCarthyism.)
- Roth, Henry, *Call it Sleep*. 1934. (An immigrant Jewish boy vividly describes the noise, brutality and terror he experiences as a small boy both at home and in his raw New York City neighbourhood.)
- Roth Philip, *American Pastoral*. 1997. (The disaffected daughter of a successful Jewish family at the East Coast causes havoc and demolishes their world and idealism by turning towards terrorism.)
- Steinbeck, John, *The Grapes of Wrath*. 1939. (Impoverished and expropriated Oklahoma farmers seek work in California during the Great Depression and are confronted there by fierce discrimination)
- Twain, Mark, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. 1912. (In this brilliant sequel to Tom Sawyer, Huck, Tom's unschooled friend, escapes from the motherly protection of the Douglas Widow and her sister Miss Watson when his good-for-nothing father appears to demand the boy's fortune. On his flight he meets Miss Watson's runaway slave Jim and, together with him, experiences many wild adventures.)
- Welty, Eudora, *The Optimist's Daughter*. 1972. (As Laurel McKelva, a young woman working in Chicago, goes back to her hometown in the South to see her dying father, Judge McKelva, she is confronted both with her own past as well as with Fay, her younger stepmother, with whom she doesn't get along.)
- Williams, Tennessee, *A Street Car Named Desire*. 1947. (Set in New Orleans' slums this play brings into violent contrast the neurotic dream world of Blanche DuBois and her brother-in-law Stanley's masculine realism. What triggers their conflict is Blanche's visit to her sister Stella, whose squalid life with Stanley horrifies her and makes her idealise their family fortune which they have lost through bankruptcy even more.)
- Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*. 1955. (On his sixty-fifth birthday, Big Daddy Pollitt, vulgar, fat, ruthless, and the richest cotton planter of the Mississippi Delta, is surrounded by his family. Old tensions erupt and escalate as various family lies and secrets are dragged into light.)

Wright, Richard,

Black Boy. 1945. (This autobiographical account of the author's boyhood incorporates an evocation of the Deep South, the boy's difficult life in a segregated society and his struggle to become an artist.)

Native Son. 1940. (Bigger Thomas, a young black man, is shown to be the victim of a hostile environment as he commits a gruesome murder on the daughter of his white employer.)

CANADA

Atwood, Margaret,

A Handmaid's Tale. 1985 (After a staged terrorist attack kills the President and most of Congress, the government is deposed and taken over by the oppressive and all-controlling Republic of Gilead. Offred, now a Handmaid serving in the household of the enigmatic Commander and his bitter wife, can remember a time when she lived with her husband and daughter and had a job, before she lost even her own name. Despite the danger, Offred learns to navigate the intimate secrets of those who control her every move, risking her life in breaking the rules in hopes of ending this oppression.)

Cats Eye. 1988. (This brilliant and haunting novel focuses on four girlfriends growing up together. As the central character Elaine slowly comes to terms with traumas inflicted by Cordelia, the leader in their foursome, Cordelia herself increasingly founders.)

AFRICA

Achebe, Chinua,

Things Fall Apart. 1958. (This famous novel imaginatively recreates traditional life in Igbo villages before the onset of modernity, and focuses on the headstrong Okonkwo, who opposes, with tragic consequences, both converted Christians and British colonial interference.)

Coetzee, J.M.,

Waiting for the Barbarians. 1980. (For decades the Magistrate has run the affairs of a tiny undefined frontier settlement, ignoring the impending war between the barbarians and the Empire, whose servant he is. But when the interrogation experts arrive, he is jolted into sympathy with the victims and into an act of rebellion.)

Disgrace. 1999. (David Lurie, a middle-aged white professor at a South African university, is dismissed from his post after seducing one of his students. Jobless, shunned by friends, and ridiculed by his ex-wife, he retreats to his daughter Lucy's smallholding. But when she is raped by a black gang, he is forced to look at his own act of sexual transgression.)

Gordimer, Nadine,

My Son's Story. 1990. (A black South African adolescent who admires his father for his political fight, discovers that he has an affair with a white woman activist. Torn between loyalty to both his parents, he and his sister have to learn to deal with some bitter realities of black South African life.)

Paton, Alan,

Cry, the Beloved Country. 1948. (This is the deeply moving story of the Zulu pastor Stephen Kumalo and his son Absalom, set against the background of a land and a people riven by racial injustice.)

MIDDLE EAST

Hisham Matar,

In the Country of Men. 2006 (It is summer vacation and one of nine-year-old Suleiman's favorite games is "My Land, Your Land" which he often plays with his close friend Kareem. "My Land" in his case is Libya, a country where the "unfaithful" are punished and where prominent pictures of the "Guardian," Colonel Muammar Gaddafi must be displayed to avoid suspicion by the central authorities. In such a harsh political climate, Suleiman knows trouble will soon find his father just like it did Kareem's father, Ustath Rashid... .)

INDIA, PAKISTAN, BANGLADESH, SRI LANKA

- Adiga, Aravind,** *The White Tiger. 2008.* The novel provides a darkly humorous perspective of India's class struggle in a globalized world as told retrospectively by Balram Halwai, a village boy. In detailing Balram's journey first to Delhi, where he works as a chauffeur to a rich landlord, and then to Bangalore, the place to which he flees after killing his master and stealing his money, the novel examines issues of religion, caste, loyalty, corruption and poverty in India.)
- Last Man in Tower. 2011.* (This novel tells the story of a struggle for a slice of shining Mumbai real estate. The protagonist of the novel is a retired schoolteacher named Yogesh A. Murthy, who is affectionately known as Masterji. A prominent builder offers to buy out the entire apartment block. All of the occupants agree, except for Masterji. This creates problem for the builder and the other residents. . . .)
- Hamid, Mohsin,** *Moth Smoke. 2001.* (When Daru Shezad is fired from his banking job in Lahore, he begins a decline that plummets the length of this sharply drawn, subversive tale. Before long, he loses his toehold among Pakistan's cell-phone-toting elite. Daru descends into drugs and dissolution. Desperate to reverse his fortunes, he embarks on a career in crime. When a long-planned heist goes awry, Daru finds himself on trial for a murder he may or may not have committed.)
- The Reluctant Fundamentalist. 2007.* (The mysterious narrator tells his story at a Lahore café as dusk settles. Invited to join him for tea, you learn his name and what led this immaculate speaker of English to seek you out. For he is more worldly than you might expect; better travelled and better educated. He knows the West better than you do. As he tells you his story of how his Western dream went awry, the true reasons for your meeting becomes abundantly clear. . . .)
- Mistry, Rohinton,** *Such a Long Journey. 1991.* (Set in Bombay against the backdrop of the war leading to the creation of Bangladesh, this novel tells the story of Gustad Noble, an ordinary family father, whose life is unexpectedly affected and changed when he is drawn into the activities of Indira Gandhi's secret service.)
- A Fine Balance. 2006.* (Set in mid-1970s India, A Fine Balance is a subtle and compelling narrative about four unlikely characters who come together in circumstances no one could have foreseen soon after the government declares a 'State of Internal Emergency'. It is a breathtaking achievement: panoramic yet humane, intensely political yet rich with local delight; and, above all, compulsively readable.)
- Neel Mukherjee,** *A Life Apart. 2010.* (Ritwik Ghosh, twenty-two and recently orphaned, finds the chance to start a new life when he arrives in England from Calcutta. But to do so, he must not only relive his entire past but also make sense of his relationship with his mother - scarred, abusive and all-consuming. But Oxford holds little of the salvation Ritwik is looking for. Instead he moves to London, where he drops out of official existence into a shadowy hinterland of illegal immigrants.)
- The Lives of Others. 2015.* (Ambitious, rich and compassionate The Lives of Others anatomises the soul of a nation as it unfolds a family history. A novel about many things, including the limits of empathy and the nature of political action, it asks: how do we imagine our place amongst others in the world? Can that be reimagined? And at what cost? This is a novel of unflinching power and emotional force.)
- Narayan, R.K.,** *The Vendor of Sweets. 1967.* (While the colourful sweetmeats are frying in the kitchen, Jagan, a sweets vendor in the sleepy town of Malgudi, immerses himself in his copy of the Bhagavad Gita. But his firm Gandhian principles are challenged when his wastrel son Mali returns from America with "modern" values and an emancipated girlfriend.)

Roy, Arundati, *The God of Small Things. 1998.* (When Rachel returns to her childhood home, she gradually recalls the events leading up to the brutal killing of Velutha, the son of a social outcast and secret lover of her mother Ammu.)

Suri, Manil, *The Death of Vishnu. 2001.* (This award-winning novel about social and religious tensions in India takes place in an apartment building in contemporary Mumbai. Middle-class and competitive, the Asranis and the Pathaks share a kitchen in which the women systematically steal from each other; the husbands would be allies if they weren't too timid to cross their wives. Above them live the more prosperous Jalals, the building's only Muslims. Except that Mr. Jalal doesn't quite believe in Allah; instead, he entertains the possibility of all gods, and shops around. He and his wife aren't on good terms with their downstairs neighbors, reflecting a communal suspicion that seems unshared by their son, Salim, and the Asranis' teenage daughter, Kavita... .)

AUSTRALIA, NEW ZEALAND

Catton, Eleanor, *The Luminaries. 2014* (It is 1866, and Walter Moody has come to make his fortune upon the New Zealand goldfields. On arrival, he stumbles across a tense gathering of twelve local men, who have met in secret to discuss a series of unsolved crimes. A wealthy man has vanished, a whore has tried to end her life, and an enormous fortune has been discovered in the home of a luckless drunk. Moody is soon drawn into the mystery: a network of fates and fortunes that is as complex and exquisitely patterned as the night sky.)

Grenville, Kate, *Lilian's Story. 1985.* (Lilian Una Singer starts life at the beginning of the twentieth century as the daughter of a prosperous middle-class Australian family. She ends it as a cheerfully eccentric bag-lady living on the streets, quoting Shakespeare for a living. This book traces the progress of her life's journey, and why she made the choices she did. She's a person large in spirit as well as body, who wants to invent her own story, rather than allow it to be invented for her.)

The Idea of Perfection. 1999 (This book is about two people who seem the least likely in the world to fall in love. Douglas Cheeseman is an awkward engineer, the sort of divorced man you'd never look at twice. Harley Savage is a big, plain, abrasive woman who's been through three husbands and doesn't want another. Both of them bring all kinds of unhappy baggage to their meeting in the little town of Karakarook, New South Wales, population 1,374... .)

Winton, Tom *Cloudstreet. 1998.* (From separate catastrophes, two families flee to Perth and find themselves sharing this great sighing structure and beginning their lives again from scratch. Together they roister and rankle in a house that begins as a roof over their heads and becomes a home for their hearts. In this fresh, funny novel, full of wonder and dreams, Tim Winton weaves the threads of lifetimes, of twenty years of shouting and fighting, laughing and grafting, into a story about acceptance and belonging.)